

## INVESTING REGIONAL STEWARDSHIP FUNDS

Northern Kentucky University, as shown above, has been heavily engaged in regional stewardship for a decade, has invested heavily in aligning itself for regional stewardship, and has a strong infrastructure supporting this work. In fact, NKU is one of the national leaders in regards to regional stewardship. This leadership position has been validated in many ways including NKU's selection as one of four universities participating in ***Making Place Matter*** and one of thirteen selected as advisors and pilot schools for the Carnegie Foundation's new elective classification regarding community engagement.

As shown above, NKU has either completed or has on-going work related to each of the elements that CPE has proposed for the initial phase of the regional stewardship work of the comprehensive universities. What NKU most needs is to expand its intellectual capacity to carry out its regional stewardship work.

The Vision 2015 report provides a roadmap for the region and will be adapted to serve also as the roadmap for NKU's future. The university intends to structure its future planning around the goals of Vision 2015, build out the university in areas needed by the region, and collaborate with the community to achieve the goals of Vision 2015. To travel this path, the university proposes to use the initial \$200,000 to hire additional faculty who will work closely with Vision 2015.

Specifically, the university will hire five new faculty who will be assigned half-time to teaching (supported with existing university funds) and half-time to regional stewardship work (supported with regional stewardship infrastructure funds). The five will include two early childhood educators, two informatics faculty, and one faculty member in the health-related disciplines. The rationale for the positions follows.

One of the focal areas for Vision 2015 is *Educational Excellence*, where there is a goal to *exceed national education performance standards at every level*. The Vision 2015 report articulates seven strategies for achieving the goal, one of which relates to early childhood education. Because NKU does not have sufficient faculty expertise in this area, the university is intending to hire two new faculty who specialize in early childhood education. They will provide the community with expert consulting help, technical service, continuing education, applied research, and program evaluation. And they will help prepare a strong cadre of professionals ready to work in the field.

Economic competitiveness is a major focus of Vision 2015. The report states:

*Talented and skilled workers are fundamental to the ability of regions like Northern Kentucky to retain and attract high technology companies, advanced manufacturing, and advanced services firms. . .Jobs in these sectors tend to pay higher wages, but also require workers with advanced training or education. The ability to hire these workers with skill and knowledge is a core requirement of technology companies, and for many, the basis for their success.*

The Vision 2015 report also points out that *“Northern Kentucky must take advantage of opportunities to create high wage jobs in high technology businesses as one way to increase the region’s wealth.”*

With technology jobs featured so prominently in Vision 2015, it is incumbent upon the university to prepare the talented workforce that is needed to fill these jobs that will contribute significantly to the region’s economic growth and stability. It is also imperative that NKU have the expertise to provide research and consulting help that is critical to attracting and retaining technology firms within the region. For these reasons, the university created a new college, the College of Informatics, and the state funded a new building that will house the college. The university must now expand the faculty talent base for the college. The regional stewardship infrastructure funds will be used to hire two additional faculty in informatics.

A third focus of Vision 2015 is “livable communities,” and Vision 2015 articulates seven strategies for ensuring that the Northern Kentucky region is a livable community. One strategy states: *“Conduct ongoing health and social needs assessments and implement a comprehensive regional approach to meet and fund those needs.”* The report goes on to describe three specific actions associated with the strategy:

- *Establish an Alliance for Healthy Life Stages and Cycles to develop and implement a database/mapping system to help communities plan for healthier lifestyles;*
- *Map existing organizations or programs for health needs and identify organizations/programs lacking in various communities.*
- *Measure the prevalence (and decline) of known health risk factors in the community.*

The strategy and actions relate to public health and health education, but NKU currently lacks sufficient faculty expertise in these areas. The infrastructure funds will be used to fill this void. The new faculty member will not only be able to provide expertise to the community as it implements the related strategy, but he/she will also oversee the development of degree programs that will graduate persons prepared to work in the public health arena and contribute to the region being a “livable community.”

It will not be possible for NKU to fill all five new faculty positions on short notice; searches must be conducted to identify the best people for the positions. NKU will hire the faculty as soon as practically possible, but the lag time affords the university the opportunity to use a portion of the money to support some important, one-time-only expenses. Since one cannot predict when each position will be filled, it is difficult to anticipate the exact funding that will be available for these one-time-only expenses, so they are listed here in priority order.

- Funds for five faculty searches
- Start-up costs for five faculty positions, to include desks, chairs, file cabinets, bookcases, computers, printers, and miscellaneous supplies

- Funds to develop the software for an online system that will enable faculty to record all of their accomplishments – especially detailed data associated with outreach and public engagement – for use by (a) the university in fulfilling its reporting requirements and (b) the faculty member in creating his/her own performance review documents. The need for this was discussed at the time that UK and NKU presented their survey instruments to KIAG.
- Funds to support faculty in integrating service learning into their existing courses.

## CONCLUSION

Northern Kentucky University is ready to move forward, to expand and intensify its commitment to regional stewardship. In the past decade, the university has been deeply involved with its region. The university has repeatedly sought input from the community through the president's VVV process and through the university's numerous advisory committees. ***Making Place Matter*** connected the university with community leaders in a facilitated, formalized planning process that was later subsumed by Vision 2015. The NKU president co-chaired Vision 2015, and at least two dozen faculty and administrators were heavily involved in the process, serving as analysts, advisors, and members of Action Teams, the Leadership Group, and the Steering Committee that produced the final report of Vision 2015.

As an outgrowth of ***Making Place Matter***, the university created SHAPE, an NKU committee that focused on aligning the university for public engagement. While not perfectly aligned for this work, the university is certainly well aligned in many areas, including its mission, vision, and core values; its guidelines for reappointment, promotion, and tenure; its recruiting policies; its publications; and its use of external advisory councils.

The university has created and funded an extensive infrastructure to support its role as a regional steward. It has completed or has on-going efforts that relate to all of the tasks that CPE has indicated should be completed in the first stage of implementing a regional stewardship program.

Finally, the university has a plan for how it will use the initial \$200,000 that is being awarded to each of the Commonwealth's comprehensive universities.

The university is poised to move to the next level in its service as a regional steward. All it needs is the go-ahead from the Council on Postsecondary Education, indicating that the \$200,000 will be released to the university.